

Regional Meeting Report #5

Virginia State Preparedness Report (SPR) Project Regional Meeting, Region IV The SW Virginia Higher Education Conference Center Abingdon, VA; Dec 5, 2007

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Period: Dec 5, 2007
Project: A702-025

Purpose: The following information is presented in bullet format, by breakout group, without supporting comments and recommendations. The purpose of this report is to provide the program managers with a snapshot of the regions' current accomplishments and capabilities and the recommended targets and initiatives for the future.

The comments are presented without attribution to a particular agency or individual.

Enhance Regional Collaboration:

Accomplishments and Capabilities:

- There are Planning Districts in the regions of Mt. Empire, Mt. Rogers, Lenowisco and Cumberland Plateau.
- There are nineteen (19) jurisdictions within the planning districts.
- The local VSP District participates in the Virginia Fusion Center system – region, state and national information sharing. Discusses terrorism, gangs and criminal activity.
- Virginia Police have a department that meets within the state for pipeline safety.
- The Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council (ATAC) is active in the region
- Fire Department has a fire board that meets quarterly.
- An EMS Council meets regularly
- Public Safety and VITA representatives for Info Technology work with 911 directory to consolidate counties into a regional dispatch system
- VITA uses their program management to offer public services such as wireless to help localities.
- Work with the state police to offer supplies, equipment, recruits, train, retain and educate locals to establish a region (?).
- Emergency Management Department and HAZMAT have plenty of volunteers but lack full time people without current obligations (wear many hats).
- Resources are limited and the region needs better preparedness planning, training, and funding.
- Would like to have a full time EM planner or a reliable person for major emergencies. (Not after the fact).
- PSAP –(Public Safety Answering Point) aka 911 Dispatcher – have established several groups (local 911 managers) that meet via phone.

- Local jurisdictions have created MOU's for mutual support.
- Homeland Security – office officials meet quarterly.
- There is a Public Safety Support Data Center in Russell County to help build statewide IP System.
- Medical collaboration – Hospital (Bristol)
- ADHOC local and private groups meet.
- VITA conducts outreach to Southwestern Virginia – communications.

Targets for 2010:

- Add Emergency Preparedness as a priority on local city and county officials' priority lists and agendas
- Need additional full time emergency planners or logisticians on the regional or Planning District staffs
- Enhance the volunteer Fire Departments and EMS by adding paid Firefighters and EMS personnel into their departments.
- Enhance the funds available within local jurisdictions (cost recovery) by addressing and implementing the "pay for services" plan within the region
- City of Norton has firefighters but brought up that they rely on volunteers and discussed possible sources of revenue recovery to provide dependable EMS staffing. This would provide some paid positions in addition to the volunteers.
- Enhance operability within the region by fully implementing the PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) system
- Operability is needed within individual localities to be operable within the region.
- Future ATAC enhancements with localities by adding trained district analysts.
- Advise Richmond about localities and how they operate.
- Include VITA – localities.
- Insure that citizen groups at the local levels are trained, aware and prepared as a region to insure the state is really prepared.
- Fire Departments, EMS, and law enforcement need larger budgets and more equipment.
- Funded mandates are needed.
- Priorities from all regions raised to the commonwealth level.
- Would like to establish a regional system for future communication and emergencies.
- Would like a public outreach system established on a Commonwealth level.

Initiatives/Steps

- In 2008, establish local level working groups to research and make recommendations on all the above targets.

Enhance Communication Capabilities:

Accomplishments and Capabilities:

- Police and fire department can communicate with each other (High Band).
- Dispatch Centers can relay information.
- Neighboring cities use 800 Mega Hertz.
- There is a terrain issue in this area.

- General consensus is that there are limited interoperable capabilities in the local jurisdictions; however with direction from the state and dedicated funding, this will not occur.
- No platform rolled out by the state to enable the area to ascertain the benchmark to keep communications up and running or to maintain communications.
- State Police use Stars = UHF going to VHF repeater. There is no common system.
- Bids are out to build VHF system.
- Unable to get frequencies because of interference. Narrow banding could throw a “monkey wrench” into other systems.
- There is no interoperability, so how can you have operability?
- There is no common ground, no guidelines provided for localities.
- There is a consolidation process with other jurisdictions required when applying for Grants. There is no individual application process with Grants.
- There is a lack of funding and lack of personnel infrastructure in reference to writing Grants.
- Once you obtain a Grant, the time tables of the Grant usage can be complicated.
- The procurement process of a Grant is a “headache”.
- Sustainability and maintenance costs after receiving a Grant is an issue.
- Volunteers can’t buy off of state contracts.
- Sheriff’s can’t communicate with other sheriff’s in other counties.
- There were forty (40) Law Enforcement units at VA Tech and none could talk to each other. Agencies coming in didn’t know where command posts were set up. Twenty four (24) hours later Nextel set up a tower, handed out radios but the timing wasn’t sufficient. How can phone companies be inter- and intra-operable, but emergency responders can’t be that way?
- Various jurisdictions have their own licenses and agencies have their own licenses. Ex: Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association may have a license, not county or agency.
- The general public is notified and kept informed of a major emergency via radio and the news media.
- There are Grant monies received for reverse 911 to be implemented, but no monies to maintain the system.
- VA Tech has a siren alert, a mass e-mail system and text messaging.
- There is no mass list of users of cell phones.
- Have to handle voice transmission before you can handle data transmission – not ready in this area.

Targets for 2010 and Initiatives:

- Unable to talk to EMS or Public Works (Low Band).
- Promote communication via cell phone, land line, etc., during HAZMAT calls.
- Enable the area to see the cache radio programs.
- Until the local problem is fixed, you can’t worry about the state problems.
- The state must come up with a mass plan to begin with each locality first.
- Need to begin locally with standards and build local infrastructure/benchmarks to understand where we’re going.

- Need standard/funded and sustainable mandate.
- Need state assessment/funding.
- May need repeaters in cars.
- Need to define regions.
- Need MOU's between states.
- Need funding long term.
- Place state personnel in regions to assist/support local jurisdictions.
- Have Congress dictate that all wireless companies have open architecture.
- Jurisdiction had independent fire and rescue companies that will not agree to changes without outside funding being provided. (Example)

Communications Observations from four (4) meetings:

- There are extreme differences in various regions ranging from being well prepared in some to poorly prepared in others.
- Funding is a major concern especially where sustainability is concerned especially in rural areas.
- State should set a benchmark for what is expected from localities. It should be realistic and flexible.
- Regions need to be redefined with sub areas to recognize the real working relationships.
- Shortages of experienced staff are a major issue.
- Political will at county administrator level and higher is lacking.
- Tech advances are lacking in parts of the state.
- Consideration should be given at various levels for projects to be undertaken by youth at colleges, etc., for future solutions to these issues.
- Localities must be brought up to the same level before funding is given which pushes localities to the next level.
- Grant system has problems and needs major revisions.
- Many of the people attending are not decision makers.

Enhance CBRNE Detection, Response, and Decontamination:

The Critical Resources and Distribution group participants also met with this group.

Accomplishments and Capabilities:

- Updating communications system in Smyth County – experiencing many obstacles to get the system on-line.
- Specialty Response Teams in place – Technical Rescue, Swift Water, and Hazardous Materials
- Technical Rescue Team is reaching out to personnel in Smyth County
- Acquired a Disaster and Foam trailer for the Region
- Airport is building a new administration building and a backup EOC is being added
- Several of the counties and local organizations have funded local training
- EOC and 911 have moved into the Health Dept. Building to have more space to operate.
- EOC and Health EOC operate now in a joint EOC
- VDOT has a new Traffic Communications Center in Salem

- Cameras have been installed on I-81 to monitor traffic
- Cameras are also being installed on I-77
- The state incident Traffic Management System was established in this region.
- VDOT has maintained old Traffic Plans that were developed many years ago
- There is a Mass Casualty trailer in the region
- Plans have been developed for Critical Care patients during a disaster

Targets for 2010

- Need flexibility to spend State and Federal funds for the needs of the local jurisdictions
- Need additional funding - there are not enough funds given to this region to complete projects started
- Current training standards do not allow for local response agencies to respond and control a small Hazardous Materials release/incident
- There needs to be standards developed to allow for Intermediate Hazardous Materials Response
- Radiological training is offered and conducted but there is no radiological equipment to use
- The smaller counties have very limited Grant resources to obtain necessary equipment, services and personnel
- Increase the membership on the Technical Rescue Team with personnel in Smyth County
- Additional funding is needed for EOC equipment
- The funding for traffic Cameras is dwindling
- Three (3) bridges on Rt. 11 are below the needed weight limit and need repair. This creates a concern for resources traveling to where they are needed as well as re-routing traffic during a disaster on I-88.
- There is a need and a requirement to have shelter equipment available – a trailer-truck is needed to store and transport this equipment
- Funding is needed to plan and create methods for sheltering household pets
- State and Federal mandates need to include the dollars to meet the mandates
- Funding is needed to completely fund a full-time EMA Director and full time planning staff
- Road improvement funding is needed in the region to improve the roads for the resources to travel to their destinations
- There needs to be a “Basic Level Needs List” for each county in the Commonwealth
- Federal mandates need to be more realistic and able to help the jurisdiction’s needs
- A State Resource List needs to be developed and shared with each county
- A Regional Resource List needs to be developed and shared throughout the region
- There needs to be more common directives on the use of military assets by the local jurisdictions during a disaster
- Communication Systems across the state need to be up-dated - most resources can not talk to each other on a daily basis

Initiatives/Steps

- Obtain funding for:
 - Complete started programs that have stopped due to lack of funding
 - Purchase of needed equipment
 - Develop Regional and State Resource Lists
 - Hiring, salaries and support of full-time EMA Director and determined staff
- Each county needs to develop a basic needs list and submit this list to the state for analysis and standard development
- Better communications is needed for counties to obtain pertinent and necessary information
- State and Federal agencies need to be informed to accept comments before issuing mandates
- State and Federal agencies need to fund mandates and allow the counties to spend the money as they see fit
- The State needs to develop Task Groups to:
 - Develop a state-wide “Basic Level Needs List” Standard
 - Develop Hazardous Materials Standard to allow for limited Hazardous Materials response and control
 - Develop a State-wide Resource List and to maintain this list
 - Obtain and share military directives and resource lists with each county
- Funding is required for VDOT to:
 - Improve the conditions of the roads in order to maintain resource travel
 - Improve the bridges in the region to maintain the resource travel

Enhance Planning and COOP:

This information is from Bland and Wythe Counties who were the only locality representatives present. A National Guard rep. was present also.

Accomplishments and Capabilities:

- Have an EOP
- Have a regional mitigation plan
- Have completed a HAZMAT flow study
- Established access to WebEOC
- County Govt. and Emergency services have completed NIMS training
- Communications are using a plain language format
- Have GIS
- Have a dedicated 911 system and Emergency Operations Center
- Have a basic sheltering plan
- Participate in quarterly meetings and strategic planning with surrounding jurisdictions

Targets for 2010

- Develop and implement a regional 911 plan
- Secure funding and support for upcoming emergency management projects

- Develop MOU's with surrounding jurisdictions
- Secure funding and support to re-establish a LEPC for Bland Co.
- Complete revision of the Bland's EOP
- Secure funding and support for implementing reverse 911 system
- Update HAZMAT commodity flow study
- Expand NIMS training to all levels of Govt.
- Secure funding to conduct regional training exercises
- Develop a Public Outreach Program
- Develop and implement a COOP Plan
- Develop a Cross Training Program for Emergency Management personnel
- Establish a CERT program and team
- Develop a regional sheltering plan for large scale operations, special needs and pets
- Identify and secure funding for Logistics support
- Establish an Integrated Flood Observation Warning System (IFLOW)
- Seek funding to support emergency services and response

Initiatives/Steps

- Secure funding to cover the following targets:
 - Revise the EOP
 - Update the HAZMAT Plan
 - Revise the Mitigation Plan
 - Establish the LEPC
 - Develop a plan to deliver Cross Training Program to staff
 - Refocus the state priorities so they can be applied to the rural localities
 - Increase WebEOC capabilities

Evacuation, Shelter-in-Place, and Mass Care (Shelter and Feeding):

This working group had no participants and did not meet.